

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Brackenhurst College**

**May 1995**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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## **THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL**

*The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to FEFC's quality assessment committee.*

*College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.*

### **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

*The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses. The descriptors for the grades are:*

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 40/95

## BRACKENHURST COLLEGE

### EAST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected October 1994 - January 1995

#### Summary

Brackenhurst College in Nottinghamshire specialises in courses related to the land-based and food industries, and to rural activities. The college has a high profile in the rural community that it serves. Relationships with other educational providers are productive. Specialist provision is generally of high quality and there are high standards of student achievement in most areas of work. The estate which includes the college farm, is operated effectively for educational purposes. Open and supportive relationships between staff and students have produced an ethos of care for the individual. The college has improved the efficiency with which it conducts its business and has secured a sound financial base. The governors provide valuable expertise. The college should articulate more clearly its strategic direction; strengthen management structure; develop a coherent marketing strategy; develop comprehensive and effective procedures for quality assurance; ensure that major college functions are monitored systematically; develop systems and resources to support its plans to increase the work which students undertake independently; and extend and widen student access and participation.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below..

<b>Aspects of cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Responsiveness and range of provision	3
Governance and management	3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Agriculture	2	Equestrian studies	2
Horticulture	3		

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Brackenhurst College was inspected between October 1994 and January 1995. Forty-six inspector days were used during this period for the inspection of specialist subjects and aspects of cross-college provision. An inspector with experience from outside the world of education joined the team for three days to examine progress on the college charter. Inspectors visited 85 classes and examined samples of students' work. They held discussions with staff, students, college governors, and representatives from local schools, employers, North Nottinghamshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), Nottingham Trent University and community groups. A range of documents, including the college's strategic plan and self-assessment report, also provided evidence for the inspection.

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 Brackenhurst College was founded in 1949 as the Nottinghamshire Farm Institute. It is situated close to the Georgian town of Southwell in Nottinghamshire, 12 miles from Nottingham and eight miles from Newark. It is a centre for education and training for the land-based and food industries, and for rural activities. In 1993-94, 62 per cent of students came from Nottinghamshire, 14 per cent from other parts of the East Midlands region and 24 per cent from elsewhere.

3 At the time of the inspection, 610 students were enrolled on programmes of study funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). A further 61 students were enrolled on higher education courses through association with Nottingham Trent University. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2 and enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area in figure 3. There is a full-time equivalent staff of 35 teachers and 65 support staff. Staff expressed as full-time equivalents are shown in figure 4.

4 The college estate extends to 200 hectares. This includes the main college site, farm, equestrian centre, horticultural unit and amenity grounds. All the teaching units are situated within a radius of half a mile from the main site. The farm is managed as a commercial enterprise and also serves as a resource for students studying agriculture. The estate provides facilities for students of woodland and countryside management, environmental and conservation studies and the development of equestrian skills. The equestrian centre includes stabling for 60 horses, an indoor riding school, outdoor manege and a cross-country course. The horticultural unit and college grounds provide practical facilities for horticulture programmes. An outdoor environmental education centre is available for use by Nottinghamshire schools. A nine-hole golf course is under construction. Additional teaching facilities include a rural enterprise unit, laboratories, workshops for agricultural and horticultural engineering, information technology facilities and a range of teaching and seminar rooms. A learning-resource centre has been established. There

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is residential accommodation for 120 students which is available for commercial lettings during vacations.

5 In its mission statement the college states that its main focus is on the development of individuals towards their personal vocational objectives. Among its objectives the college has identified widening access and the expansion of curriculum provision to meet the needs and aspirations of individual students.

#### **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

6 The college has developed and extended its range of agriculture courses starting from a base of the national certificate in agriculture and youth training. Provision is now available at Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diploma, national diploma and higher national diploma levels. The agricultural engineering provision offers appropriate programmes for 16-19 year old craft students. In equine studies, provision covers the full range of qualification levels for full-time students. There is an increased emphasis on National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) as well as British Horse Society certificates which are still offered as an optional extra qualification. In collaboration with Southwell Racecourse, the college introduced a course leading to a BTEC national certificate in horse racing industry operations linked to NVQ level 3 standards of the Racing and Thoroughbred Breeders' Training Board. This was a positive response to the training needs of the industry. However, recruitment to the programme has been low. Provision in floristry and horticulture is underdeveloped and the opportunities for progression to the more advanced qualifications are limited. The college should research potential markets and promote its courses more vigorously.

7 Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is offered through a foundation programme covering basic and life skills, integrated with aspects of farming and horticulture. The programme leads to NVQ level 1 in horticulture or agriculture. Some equine work is available but it is not formally accredited. Where appropriate, work experience is offered. Currently there are six full-time students participating in this programme as well as 16-plus students from two special schools and adults from a day centre in Nottingham. Youth training students join the programme on one day per week. Teaching and support staff help to ensure that the students take an active part in the general life of the college.

8 The college is committed to 'seek to develop and encourage new initiatives for groups of students outside the traditional age range'. It has made a small start towards this with the provision of the RSA Examinations Board computer literacy and information technology and business administration level 2 course for women wishing to return to work. In addition, a national certificate in countryside management was launched in 1994. Thirty-two students have been recruited. The college does not have creche or playgroup facilities which is a disadvantage in attempting to recruit older students.

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9 A statement on equality of opportunity is included in the strategic plan. This statement also appears in the college handbook for students and informs the disciplinary code. The statement is basically that of the local education authority (LEA) which has been amended to take account of the changed status of the college. There has been little involvement of staff or students in producing the policy and the college recognises that further work needs to be done before an equal opportunities policy can be formally adopted and effectively implemented. All new staff appointments are monitored in terms of ethnic background and gender. It is not clear how the information gained will be used by the college. Students' course preferences generally reflect typical balances between men and women; for example there are far more women than men taking equine studies but agricultural engineering courses are male dominated. There are very few students from minority ethnic groups attending the college.

10 The college has fostered good relationships with local schools. It is an active member of a group of schools and colleges involved in a technical and vocational education initiative. Assessor and verifier training is provided for school staff. Brackenhurst College and Newark and Sherwood College collaborated in drawing up their college charters and in producing a handbook for school students to describe routes for progression beyond the age of 16. The college is also working within the initiative group to contribute to the new General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in science. The college contributes to the cost of a teacher to develop materials and deliver environmental studies programmes to school groups and to support programmes devised in conjunction with school staff. The college estate is used as a practical resource for environmental education in schools. In partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council Environmental Education Support Services, the college provides a classroom for the use of visiting groups of school pupils. Currently the college is extending this provision by refurbishing an additional classroom. At present, these facilities are most heavily used by primary school pupils but more work with secondary schools is planned.

11 Good relationships are maintained with Nottinghamshire County Council LEA. There is a small adult education programme operated on a contract with the LEA. Opportunities to build on this base and expand this provision have not been taken. Updating courses have been provided for Nottinghamshire County Council Landscape Services Department on the Food and Environmental Protection Act. The college has taken the lead in a nationally funded project for the food and drink industry. A consortium of major employers has been set up and the college is working with them to develop NVQs by helping the employers to implement guidelines, train work-based assessors and support candidates. There are good working relationships with both the local TECs. For example, performance criteria have been developed and agreed with North Nottinghamshire TEC. The college also responded well to an initiative of the Greater Nottingham TEC by providing courses for miners who had been made redundant. The

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programmes offered are NVQ levels 1 and 2 in landscaping and amenity horticulture with some specialist courses in chain sawing and spraying.

12 Brackenhurst College is an associate college of Nottingham Trent University. It is working with the university to provide progression routes for Brackenhurst students and to broaden the choice for those seeking higher education opportunities. In particular, there are close links with the faculty of science and mathematics. Units of the university's higher national level courses in applied biology in food science have been delivered by staff from Brackenhurst College since 1982. The college's expertise in food technology and equine studies complements the university's range of courses. Other higher education programmes provided are higher national level courses in rural land management, in landscape design, in food science and in equine studies.

13 The college has delivered a three-year project in Poland funded by the government. This has involved both consultancy and training in aspects of food technology. The Polish connection has developed from the initiative of Nottingham County Council's twinning arrangements with the Polish province of Poznan. College staff have travelled to Poland to provide advice and support. Polish industrialists have visited the college for training courses and have been welcomed into governors' homes and businesses. The college has advised on the design and development of a dairy training centre in Poznan. A particularly innovative aspect of the project is the validation of a higher national certificate qualification in science (applied food studies) to be delivered in the centre in Poznan. To enable Polish staff to deliver the programme, staff development is being provided by Brackenhurst College.

14 The college is a focal point for the agricultural community within the county. The chairman of the county branch of the National Farmers' Union represents the views of the industry locally through his membership of two college committees. The college hosts many activities such as the Southwell ploughing match, the Rogation Sunday procession from Southwell Minster, the Nottinghamshire Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs, the Farm Business Association, the Farm and Wildlife Advisory Group and Nottinghamshire Country Women's Club. The equestrian centre is used for competition work by members of the community. There is a guided farm trail which is accessible to the public. Part of this trail can be followed by wheelchair users.

15 Industry representatives and employers are consulted about current trends and future needs through advisory committees. Members of these committees provide a broad spectrum of expertise relevant to the programme areas which they support. Their involvement is much valued by the college. The advisory panel for equestrian studies is a good example of the supportive links with industry that have been developed. Panel members offer students work placements and extra activities to extend their coursework, as well as contributing an employer's perspective to course review and development.



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16 The college has no coherent marketing strategy and recognises the need to remedy this. There is some tension between the maintenance of a traditional range of courses for land-based industries and the development of a greater variety of provision. A clear response is needed to the evolving patterns of employment in the land-based industries as well as to the changing needs and aspirations of potential students. The college has been slow to give detailed consideration to these issues. The targets for course enrolments which the college set itself were not met in 1994. Many courses are running on low numbers. Although some groups combine to create viable group sizes, the list of full-time courses records that more than 30 groups are being used in the teaching of 273 students. There has been little action to improve viability. With the exception of the first diploma in equine studies, recruitment to first diploma courses was poor. The senior management team has discussed the problems associated with transport from home to college which they consider as one factor which deters some students from joining full-time courses.

### **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

17 The college has a valuable resource in the expertise and commitment of its governors. There are 14 board members including the principal, a TEC nominee and a nominee elected from the college staff. The business governors have extensive experience in areas directly related to the college's work. Non-voting members, including the college's senior staff and an observer from the LEA, attend most meetings. The college's chief administration officer acts as clerk to the board. Attendance at board meetings is generally good. Most board members have a long association with the college. They maintain contact outside formal meetings by participating in advisory committees, open days and a wide range of social events.

18 Board members generally show an awareness of the changes in their roles and responsibilities since incorporation. A recent training session on the responsibilities of governors was widely appreciated and there is a commitment to further training events. The board has not yet formally considered the monitoring of its own performance. Members are keen advocates of the college. They see one of their functions as acting as college ambassadors in their local, regional, national and international roles. The board has identified the renewal of membership as an issue but has yet to determine a mechanism for carrying this out. There are currently no female members of the board. Meetings encourage debate and are carried out in a business-like way. There are three major committees; finance, farm and audit. Property and remuneration are subcommittees of the finance committee, which also deals with personnel issues. Terms of reference for all committees have been agreed. The farm and finance committees work well and report regularly. Property and remuneration committees have not yet submitted reports to the full board and their functions need review. A review of the college committee structure has

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taken place and sensible decisions have been made about revisions to the structure and status of student disciplinary and health and safety committees. Reporting arrangements from the academic board to the governors are unsatisfactory. Currently, the evidence upon which recommendations are made to the academic board is not presented to governors, so that only partial information is available to them when reaching their decisions.

19 Governors have not yet established a clear strategic direction for the college. The college's current strategic aims and objectives are diffuse and lack coherence, and as a result progress towards goals cannot easily be checked. The lack of clarity leads to varying interpretation of the college's priorities by different people in different contexts. The strategic plan contains no estimate of the resources required to implement the stated objectives. Given these deficiencies in forward planning, there is a danger that decisions about developments will be unduly influenced by short-term financial imperatives without due consideration being given to the impact on the college's performance and its industrial credibility. The commitment of governors and staff to a common set of priorities is required.

20 The college has made progress in improving planning procedures. A revised operational plan was submitted to the board in November 1994 which makes some objectives more specific, and relates them to assigned timescales and responsibilities. This will enable the college to monitor its progress more effectively. Staff are encouraged to contribute to plans for future developments on an individual basis and through structured groups such as the curriculum managers' and tutors' forum. Curriculum development plans, including new course submissions, are researched by small groups and fed into academic board meetings. However, the reasons why some of these developments are taken forward is not clear since they are not supported by information that clearly links them to the college's strategic objectives. Targets for monitoring success are not always set.

21 The average level of funding for the college in 1994-95 is £31.86 per unit. The median average level of funding for all agricultural colleges in 1994-95 is £28.37 per unit. The college inherited a deficit of £244,000 in September 1992. Improvement of the college's financial position has been the major preoccupation of governors and the finance committee has monitored progress closely. An operating surplus of £197,000 was achieved at the end of the 16-month accounting period to 31 July 1994. Financial regulations and procedures have been approved by the board and are gradually being developed and refined. The senior management team hold a monthly meeting to review finance. They receive comprehensive management accounts, presented by the finance officer. Staff have also been made aware of the need for cost effectiveness. Gains in efficiency have been made principally by changes in the deployment of staff. There has been a 30 per cent reduction in the staff teaching on

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further education programmes over the last four years. Additional income has been generated in a variety of ways and some projects have contributed a significant net surplus to the college budget. Funding from the FEFC makes up 50 per cent of the college's income. Further details of the college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

22 The information required for monitoring the financial position of the college is well used, but there has been slower progress towards the use of data in other areas of the college's work. Governors are aware of the key indicators required to monitor progress towards achieving the mission but they have not yet received the relevant information which will enable monitoring to take place. The college inherited an over-complex computerised system and is seeking to replace it. The strategy for the development of a management information system across the college is not clear. The college is unable to use all the information that is currently available to inform decision making because it cannot be brought together readily in a digestible form. Limited analysis of information is carried out using spreadsheets, but modelling to take account of risks and the balance of costs and benefits is not often practised. Nevertheless, there are examples of good practice to draw on, for example, in board decisions on farm expenditure. Analysis of course costs has not yet been carried out. The accounting software has only recently been upgraded to include the capacity to report to budget holders on committed expenditure.

23 The senior management team consists of the principal, vice-principal, chief administrative officer, director of studies and director of resources. There is an effective team ethos and sense of collective responsibility. Job descriptions for senior team members have been drafted and the process of refining these descriptions may help to resolve some problems of duplication and overlap in responsibilities. Management of the curriculum was revised to a matrix structure in 1990. Unit managers are responsible for budgets which cover the purchase of consumable items and repairs, health and safety, stock control, capital bids and income generation from their units. Curriculum managers are responsible for curriculum delivery, quality and development. Responsibilities for course management are generally well understood. Almost all the teaching staff hold a post which carries a level of management responsibility. The current curriculum management structure is not based on any clear identification of what the institution requires to implement the strategic plan. In some instances, there is confusion in reporting lines so that accountability is weakened. The effectiveness of management within the current structure should be reviewed.

24 Communication between staff is generally effective. The decisions of meetings are routinely recorded in the form of points for action. A weekly diary sheet and frequent 'information and action' sheets are used to communicate administrative items. In some cases, there is an over reliance

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on informal communication. Informal mechanisms have stood the college in good stead in the past but its increasing size and diversity and the pace of change mean that there is an increasing and acknowledged need for overall policies to provide a framework for action. The absence of an environmental policy is a particularly noteworthy deficiency given the college's interest and expertise in this area.

### **STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

25 There is sound practice in recruitment, tutoring, guidance and support based on a strong tradition of care and a family atmosphere. The college is seen by students as supportive and trustworthy in the way in which it treats them and in its response to individuals' needs. The majority of students are satisfied with the support they receive. Staff are described as approachable and ready to give informed advice.

26 There is a programme of open days in the college. Brackenhurst representatives attend a wide range of events where informative literature about the college is distributed. Students, parents and other agencies report an effective and warm response to enquiries. There is a productive link with the Newark Careers Office for careers guidance and planning. College guidance interviews are constructive. The administration of interviews is efficient and student records are well maintained. Students have appropriately controlled access to their personal records. Full-time students' recruitment is heavily dependent on students receiving discretionary awards. Over the academic years 1993-94 and 1994-95, research by college staff indicated that 28 per cent of those students who withdrew shortly before the start of the year identified failure to receive a discretionary award as the reason.

27 There are effective procedures for enrolment and induction. Week-long induction courses provide the opportunity to distribute and explain the content of course information packs and the services of the college. Students are invited to evaluate the effectiveness of the induction programme. Introductory sessions are held for workshop activities which are aimed at supporting the development of study skills and techniques. These sessions help students to begin personal action plans which set out individual targets for improvement. Students' individual needs for support with literacy and numeracy are identified through a screening process. Ever greater demands are being placed upon learning support. These are in part due to the identification of needs through screening but also reflect the wider range of students attending the college and the increased emphasis on self-directed learning as a cost effective means of course delivery. Systems need to be set up, and resources allocated, to support the planned development of this student-centred approach to learning.

28 There are regular individual and group tutorials for all full-time students. Part-time students receive less formal support. Tutorials play a central role in ensuring academic progress. They are linked to the action

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plans that students draw up to record their personal learning targets. Reading weeks have been established during which students are set a programme of unsupervised study. Tutorials and reading weeks vary in their effectiveness. There is no formal cross-college monitoring and evaluation of the tutorial system or of the effectiveness of reading weeks.

29 Much of the learning support at the college has been developed over the last two years. The learning-resource unit was created for the provision of general learner support and basic skills development. There is a clear and effective link between the unit and subject specialist teaching staff. The unit is proving successful in meeting students' needs for support. All students have an entitlement to attend the support unit and all courses have a weekly timetabled slot in the unit. Although students are encouraged to participate by personal tutors, attendance is voluntary. About 40 per cent attend regularly, 20 per cent intermittently and the remainder occasionally. Students attending the unit value the support they receive. Workshop sessions to develop core skills such as literacy and numeracy are available only at foundation levels. Study skills support was introduced in September 1994 and demand is particularly high from mature students. Where possible, study skills are taught on a group basis and are integrated with the relevant work in vocational areas. Attendance at these sessions results from the counselling carried out by personal tutors. There are no specialist courses in information technology although it forms part of all full-time programmes. Initially training in information technology skills is provided through separate sessions, as part of all courses.

30 The library has recently been moved to better accommodation. The environment is pleasant and a pilot scheme to open on Saturday mornings is about to begin. The library contains a careers section with compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities and specialist information and guidance concerning further and higher education opportunities. There is also a communications link to Nottingham Trent University library. The installation of personal computers in the library and dedicated software to support the preparation of records of achievement is in hand. Additionally an open access information technology facility has been established recently and is to be expanded further. Lap-top computers are available for individual use as part of learning support.

31 Personal support for students is provided through course tutoring, informal counselling by teaching staff, welfare advice, learning support and personal counselling. The intimate scale of the college enables staff to work together informally in providing support and guidance to students. However, in the context of the college's quality assurance system the links between these related functions should be evaluated.

32 Counselling is provided by the senior warden with some part-time assistance. Staff have multiple roles as counsellors, wardens and teachers. Conflicts of interest can arise where counselling, tutorial, and teaching responsibilities overlap.

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33 The present ratio of male and female wardens (four to one) does not reflect the current or predicted number of female residential students. Halls accommodate a mixture of age groups above and below the age of majority. An arrangement exists whereby, if parental consent is given, students under 18 can enjoy the freedoms granted to those who are over 18. The need to meet legal requirements which are different for those students below the age of 18, while paying due regard to the rights and expectations of older students, is causing some problems in the consistent application of college regulations.

34 There is a student association with related subcommittees to oversee student affairs, including social and recreational functions. There is also student representation on the academic board. Student association committee members are unclear about the association's constitution although this has recently been discussed by the governing body. Students are keen to play a positive role in the college's affairs through regular meetings with senior managers. Senior staff, in turn, are aware of this and have responded by planning termly meetings.

#### **TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING**

35 Of the 85 sessions observed, 67 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. The distribution of inspection grades is shown in the following table.

##### **Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study**

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
NVQ		8	13	15	2	0	38
Other intermediate		5	13	5	0	0	23
Other advanced		5	9	4	1	0	19
Other		1	3	1	0	0	5
Total		19	38	25	3	0	85

36 In agriculture, a new structure for schemes of work has benefited course planning. Individual course packs provide a clear and helpful framework for students by identifying course aims, core themes, topics to be covered and assessment schedules. Agricultural engineering programmes are coherent. The aims and objectives are shared with students, although there is a need to provide more detail about content in course packs. In most classes, new work was set in the context of previous work, the structure and activity of the class was explained and the content covered was summarised at the end. Students' interest was engaged in almost all classes by lively and enthusiastic teachers who used a variety of teaching methods. Teachers had a sound knowledge of their subjects. Students were set relevant and interesting tasks which were pitched at an appropriate level. Well-presented and informative handouts were provided. All the practical sessions observed were well planned and well

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managed. Teachers explained procedures and techniques clearly and students had ample opportunity to learn and practise skills and to extend their knowledge. For example, in a first-year national certificate and national diploma class, after an introduction and recapitulation of background knowledge by the teacher on dairy records, students undertook a task involving the completion of records in a calving book, identified and explained the numbers on an eartag, completed a pedigree registration card and undertook a task related to the upgrading of a dairy herd. This was a well-pitched and relevant task which was supported by primary records from the college farm. Students worked purposefully in small groups and learned effectively.

37 In some classroom sessions in agriculture, students spent too much time copying notes dictated by the teacher. In other classes, handouts which set out the framework of the topic to be discussed were used to good effect. Coverage of syllabus topics is satisfactory on most courses with the exception of science and mathematics in the first diploma in engineering. The college claims that science and mathematics are integrated with work in other engineering topics. In reality, there is only a limited amount of mathematical skills development although there is evidence of development in numeracy.

38 All agriculture courses have an effective and comprehensive assessment strategy. Agricultural engineering students receive a course booklet containing a detailed timetable of assessments and assignments. However, assessment criteria are not always clear and there is no breakdown of the contribution of individual assignments to an overall assessment scheme. Comprehensive records are kept of students' progress. A computer programme records the results of individual assessments and provides students with up-to-date information on their results. Twice termly meetings with a tutor give students the opportunity to review that progress. On the first diploma in agriculture, students' marked assignments contained few comments from teachers, the rationale for the allocation of marks was not apparent and no model solutions were suggested. Students generally would benefit from more detailed feedback on their assignments.

39 The course guide and college handbook are informative and helpful; they provide a good overview of the content of the horticulture programme and the methods of assessment. However, the quality of the course documentation varies widely, and many of the schemes of work are insufficiently detailed. Study packs enable students to study unsupervised, but insufficient attention has been given to the range and balance of the whole learning programme. There is inadequate integration of information technology in the technical elements of the course and the relevance of the specialist information technology element is not emphasised sufficiently. The specialist components of the first diploma in horticulture are not integrated effectively with other aspects of the course and this leads students to question the relevance of some topics.

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40 Work experience is seen as a positive feature by the full-time students. Tutors are technically knowledgeable and their effective use of anecdotal evidence to illustrate and extend topics gains the respect of students. There were frequent references to commercial applications. Good use was made of the horticultural unit to provide practical work in realistic environments. In about half of the practical classes students' work was carefully supervised. Advice from teachers was well directed and, in the best examples, students were encouraged to undertake a critical analysis of their own work. In the majority of horticulture classes the teaching took too little account of individual needs and abilities and there were insufficient checks on students' understanding of the work.

41 On the full-time course in horticulture the range and balance of assessments relate well to the course aims. Written briefs for assignments vary in quality; in some, the context in which problems are set, the specific outcomes expected, or the criteria for success are not made sufficiently explicit. Students generally receive good feedback on their coursework, but there is insufficient written comment on assignments. Work experience incorporates appropriate assessment by employers. Assessment for some part-time courses require more careful co-ordination.

42 In floristry the teaching was of a consistently high standard; the practical work was particularly good. In a floristry session in which first and second-year groups were combined, careful planning and effective class management met the needs of individuals in both groups. A variety of activities allowed the teacher to move between groups, providing effective, unhurried support. Students were able to work at their own pace. Student practice was carefully supervised; weaknesses were discussed and remedial action agreed. Teachers made frequent and effective reference to commercial standards.

43 All equestrian studies programmes have a good balance of classroom and practical work, but there are instances where time is wasted in practical sessions focusing on work which would better have been undertaken in the classroom. Some of the question and answer sessions were not sufficiently challenging. Schemes of work are appropriate but lesson plans lack detail and do not indicate how topics can be integrated. There was some inconsistency in the marking of assignments. The weighting of marks did not always reflect the emphasis placed on objectives during students' initial briefing. All full-time programmes have three reading weeks and contain an element of work experience. Students studying for the national certificate in the management of horses found the reading weeks a useful period in which to consolidate the knowledge required for NVQ assessment. Assignment and guided reading tasks are set to ensure students make good use of the time available. Extensive use is made of the college's equestrian centre for work placements, and students are also required to find other placements within specific sectors of the industry at designated times throughout the programmes. Students are not given a clearly-structured brief prior to the commencement of their



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placement and as a result diaries and reports from placements are of variable quality.

44 The college gives health and safety aspects an appropriately high profile. A management committee is responsible for the implementation of the college's health and safety policy. The committee reviews all accidents which occur. Unit managers have a responsibility for safety in their areas. Health and safety aspects of practical work are emphasised by teachers and were explained most effectively during the induction week. Several staff have received training in dealing with health and safety issues.

### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

45 Students demonstrate commitment to their courses. Retention rates are high, at about 95 per cent. Attendance is generally good and there have been significant improvements this year on some courses. Students across the college are generally well motivated. Agriculture students responded positively, learned effectively and spoke highly of their classes and teachers. On equine courses, for example, the students take a pride in their work and approach assignments with flair and enthusiasm. Most of these students are involved at weekends in equestrian activities such as managing events. Foundation students speak particularly enthusiastically about their practical work and this is reflected in their approach to classroom activities. Four students from the foundation programme have successfully completed two units each towards the NVQ by developing a portfolio using photographs and worksheets to record evidence.

46 In agriculture courses, staff set high standards. Appropriate levels of knowledge, understanding and skills are being developed. Assignments are challenging and students generally achieve satisfactory standards. Pass rates are generally good. The results for the national certificate in agriculture are improving, with pass rates over the last two years of 77 per cent and 91 per cent, respectively. The national diploma in agriculture's first cohort of students completed last year with a 100 per cent pass rate. The national certificate in food technology had 81 per cent and 100 per cent pass rates in 1992-93 and 1993-94, respectively.

47 Engineering students develop appropriate practical skills but the standard of mathematical skills achieved by first diploma students is likely to inhibit their future progress. Examination results in engineering vary. Pass rates over the last two years from the full-time City and Guilds of London Institute agricultural engineering part 2 course were 50 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively. Of the six students who completed the BTEC off-road vehicle first diploma, two received a diploma award in 1993-94.

48 High standards of work were observed in some assignments on the national certificate in horticulture. Some assignments were wordprocessed, covered the topics in considerable detail and were illustrated effectively. Both the presentation and content reached standards above the general level of the course. In other cases, the quality

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of the assignments could have been improved by a more structured and detailed coverage of the topic. There was a wide variation in the level of students' information technology skills. Practical work was generally carried out at a standard consistent with the level of the course. Course results over the last two years have been generally satisfactory. Eighty per cent of those enrolled each year on the national certificate in horticulture have passed the examination and there was a 100 per cent pass rate on the first diploma. The results of part-time vocational courses in horticulture and floristry were good with most courses achieving pass rates of over 90 per cent.

49 Students on equestrian studies courses are enthusiastic and their work generally reflects an appropriate standard for the level of course. The best assignments were well presented. Less than half of the assignments seen were wordprocessed. Course results have generally been good over the last two years. Students studying for the national certificate in the management of horses achieved a 93 per cent pass rate in 1993-94. Pass rates on the advanced certificate in equine business management over the last two years were 70 per cent and 100 per cent, respectively.

50 The intended destinations of students are collected annually. Course tutors informally gather further information about the actual destinations of students but this is not collated and analysed. A significant number of students go on to higher education. Some 40 per cent of students on equine courses and 25 per cent of horticulture students go on to higher national diploma courses. The majority of other students progress to other further education courses or relevant employment. Four out of six students who completed the first year of the national certificate in horse racing industry operations were offered and accepted jobs in yards they had worked in during their college course.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

51 There is no overall college policy on quality assurance. There is only limited use of standards or targets in any evaluation that is carried out. Quality assurance development has been applied to aspects of curriculum delivery. Current arrangements for monitoring do not include cross-college provision for tutorial support and the library. Systematic monitoring of all major college functions needs to be undertaken.

52 The college is developing a number of initiatives on quality assurance. It is building on its current, established arrangements for programme review. When the charter is fully developed the college intends to use it as a key component in the quality process. The college is committed to achieving Investors in People status during 1995-96. A number of curriculum policies are being identified for development. Many of the elements of the quality process are already in place or being developed currently. There is a need to pull these elements together as part of a

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coherent strategy for quality assurance. Management responsibility for leading such a development is not clear. The academic board has had little impact on the evaluation of programmes or development of quality assurance although those aspects are identified in its terms of reference.

53 Senior managers have been careful to involve staff in the development of quality assurance through consultation and working groups. The course managers' and tutors' meetings have been an effective forum for this work. Whilst this has ensured the commitment of staff to the initiatives under development, the lengthy processes of consultation have also slowed down the rate of progress. There is a clear desire on the part of the college to meet the needs of clients. This is reflected in the considerable effort put into canvassing the views of students and employers for components of programme review.

54 The college's self-assessment report provides a useful review of each section of college activity as identified in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement* and sets out an agenda for action. However, there is relatively little analysis and critical comment. As a result, the agenda for action is not comprehensive. In some sections of the report, for example range and responsiveness, management and quality, some significant weaknesses have been minimised or disregarded.

55 The college has worked hard to define its charter. Charter commitments for equality of opportunity and the rights of students with disabilities are understated. An implication of the pledges made in the charter is that the college must move rapidly to create an effective system of quality assurance.

56 At programme level a major strength of the course review process is the frequent and effective opportunities for students to express their views on many aspects of their experience. They are involved in reviews at several stages: after the induction programme, in mid-session and towards the end of their attendance at college. In the final review, good use is made of two industrialists from the appropriate advisory committee to provide employers' views of each course and an independent evaluation of the students' comments. However, course reviews fail to cover elements such as work experience, tutorials and use of learning resources. The outcome of a review is a set of action points. Whilst all review reports provide useful feedback, teams interpret the standard agenda in different ways. Some reports are much more detailed in their coverage than others.

57 Course team meetings make an effective contribution to the process of programme review. During their regular meetings, feedback from the course team and from students is used to monitor performance. The feedback includes comments made by students in their tutorials. Comments from moderators from examining and validating bodies are also considered by the team. Records of course team meetings generally provide an agenda and timetable for action; decisions are taken into account in planning the following year's programme. Where the

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appropriate response to students' reviews is beyond the control of the course team, the matters are referred to the senior management team. A major weakness in the process of course review is that there is no summary evaluative report of key findings and of consequent actions. The academic board receives an aggregated summary of the outcomes of student-based reviews but these lack analysis and evaluative comment. This significantly reduces the academic board's ability to monitor the quality assurance process.

58 There are effective arrangements, through course team and tutors' meetings, for identifying staff-development needs. As these meetings are attended by most teachers they have also been effective in identifying institutional needs, for example, support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The vice-principal responsible for staff development and the director of studies liaise closely to identify institutional and individual needs, but arrangements for staff to discuss their development needs in relation to institutional priorities and the needs of the section are not fully in place. There are plans to have an appraisal system fully operational in 1995-96. Working groups for academic and support staff have made good headway in establishing an agreed timescale for this initiative. The supporting documentation is available and operational arrangements are being finalised.

59 The programme for staff development has appropriate arrangements for meeting teachers' identified needs. Increasing use is being made of institutional staff-development days. These events are open to all staff. In addition, extensive use is made of working groups for specific initiatives and these often provide opportunities for staff to share good practice. Standard forms are used for staff to apply for external courses and a condition of acceptance is the submission of a report and a completed evaluation form. These arrangements allow senior managers to control and monitor activities. As a requirement of the Investors in People standard, a structured system for the induction of new staff is being developed. Currently, a reasonable procedure is in place and this is being modified and developed in consultation with newly-appointed support staff. The last new teacher appointment was 18 months ago. New staff receive considerable informal support from immediate colleagues and senior managers.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

60 There are 35 full-time equivalent teaching staff of whom nine are part time, five senior managers and 65 full-time equivalent support staff. Support staff, who include farm, estate and domestic staff, have increased over recent years as a result of the demands of incorporation and the greater emphasis placed by the college on learning support.

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61 The teaching staff are sufficient in number and have appropriate qualifications and experience to teach the courses offered by the college. In some instances, however, courses rely heavily on particular specialists. Of the full-time teaching staff, approximately a third hold degrees, over half hold a teaching qualification and nearly 90 per cent are qualified Training and Development Lead Body assessors. Teaching programmes are effectively supported by technical staff. In most areas, there is effective support from administrative staff. Forty per cent of the teaching staff and 60 per cent of the support staff are female. All full-time teaching staff are on new contracts of service.

#### **Equipment/learning resources**

62 There is a structured system for the identification and allocation of materials and equipment to support the teaching. All programmes are at least adequately equipped. The central provision of computers is heavily used for classes but there are additional facilities for students to use on a drop-in basis. Currently, these drop-in facilities are being used at about 60 per cent capacity. Teaching staff have reasonable access to computer equipment and to reprographic facilities. There are mechanisms to identify the need to replace capital items of equipment at both programme level and college level.

63 The college farm, extending to 200 hectares, is of sufficient size. It is managed by a member of the teaching staff who has a small reduction in his teaching duties to carry out this function. An active farm committee of governors and advisers meets quarterly to consider the performance of the farm and to provide advice. A standing item on the agenda of this committee is farm policy. The college's stated principle is to strike a balance between the educational provision of the farm and its commercial needs, and this is effectively achieved. The farm has an appropriate range of enterprises including a herd of 120 dairy cows, a 70 sow unit producing weaners, a flying late-lambing flock of some 120 ewes, and arable land carrying cereals and break crops. Grazing is also provided for some 60 horses. Developments are taking place on the farm to demonstrate conservation and to provide facilities to support the growing numbers of students on countryside management courses. Meetings take place annually with course managers to match the range and nature of the farm enterprises to the college's developing curriculum. The farm is well used by students in farm routines, practicals, demonstrations and the provision of farm records which, increasingly, are being computerised. Farm enterprises are managed to a commercial standard and in the current financial year are projected to generate a net trading surplus.

64 The library is developing rapidly. In the early part of the current academic year, it was moved from its former very cramped location to much more spacious accommodation converted from a conference hall. Study places are currently limited but will be increased when the construction work associated with the new mezzanine floor is complete.

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The bookstock comprising approximately 9,000 volumes is relatively large, but losses and low expenditure on replacement has resulted in much of the stock becoming dated. There are deficiencies in some areas. The college has recently devoted significant resources to improve the library stock. Expenditure over the past and current year totals nearly £55,000. About a third of this, including a grant of £2,000 from Nottingham Trent University, has been earmarked to support the college's growing provision of higher education courses. The quality and range of the books is improving and will be safeguarded by a security system. There has been a significant increase in students' rate of borrowing during the current academic year. The current library loan system is a manual one. This is time consuming for staff, and limits the ease with which library borrowing can be monitored. During term time, there are four part-time library staff (2.6 full-time equivalent) headed by a chartered senior librarian. Good links are made with teaching staff over the purchase of new stock.

### **Accommodation**

65 The college's buildings are divided, in part, by the main Nottingham to Newark road. The learning-resource unit is separated from the main college site. The buildings comprise a grade 2 listed country house, special purpose steel-framed teaching and residential facilities built in the 1960s, mobile classrooms used both for general teaching purposes and laboratories and, apart from the variety of farm buildings, specialist buildings to support horticulture, food and equine courses. The buildings and the college campus are clean and tidy. Access for people who have impaired mobility is inadequate.

66 There are 24 general classrooms. Although nearly half of these are mobiles, all are at least adequate for their purpose and are suitably equipped and furnished. Average utilisation rates are calculated by the college as being 28 per cent. This is a low figure. Only the information technology room shows a high utilisation rate. Office accommodation for teaching and support staff is good. Almost all the teaching staff have adequate work space and access to storage facilities, telephones and computer equipment. Specialist accommodation for particular courses is generally good, notably in the provision of the indoor riding school, yards and stabling for the equine courses. The horticultural accommodation and facilities have considerable potential and developments are in train to realise this. Workshops are of a satisfactory standard and there are appropriate plans to develop them further.

67 There is residential accommodation on the campus for some 120 students in hostels and converted houses. Study bedrooms are a mixture of single rooms and rooms housing up to three students. A mixture of full-board and self-catering arrangements is available. The quality of some of this accommodation is low, owing to a legacy of inadequate maintenance and problems with unreliable heating in some hostels.

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68 There are limited facilities for sports and recreation on site. The college is seeking to improve them. Students use college playing fields and a nearby leisure centre. Southwell cricket club leases the cricket pitch during summer months and this limits students' access. Pitches are fully available during winter months. An existing small bar is being replaced by a new bar adjacent to the existing cafeteria and common room space.

69 A draft outline accommodation strategy has been prepared for the college by a firm of consultants. However, no budget framework has been set in the strategic plan for the short to medium-term development of the college's buildings. An experienced premises manager has recently been appointed and a maintenance programme has been instigated, supported by an annual budget of £100,000. Significant steps for improvement have been taken, including the move of the library, the construction of further stabling and the conversion of three hostels and a former staff house to incorporate self-catering facilities. The self-catering facilities have enabled more students to afford residence at the college. As a consequence, occupancy in student residences has risen.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

70 The college has the following strengths:

- the expertise and commitment of governors
- the improvements achieved in its financial base and the efficiency of its operations
- effective links with other educational providers
- the high profile of the college within the land-based community
- the effective operation of the estate for educational purposes
- the high quality of most specialist provision
- good standards of student achievement in most areas
- a caring ethos based on open and supportive relationships between staff and students.

71 The college should:

- develop a clear strategy for development
- strengthen its management structure
- develop a coherent marketing strategy
- develop comprehensive and effective procedures for quality assurance
- ensure the systematic monitoring of major college functions
- ensure that systems and resources are adequate to support the planned development of independent learning
- develop mechanisms and strategies to extend student access and participation.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

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  - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

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  - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

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  - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

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  - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

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  - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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**Note:** the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

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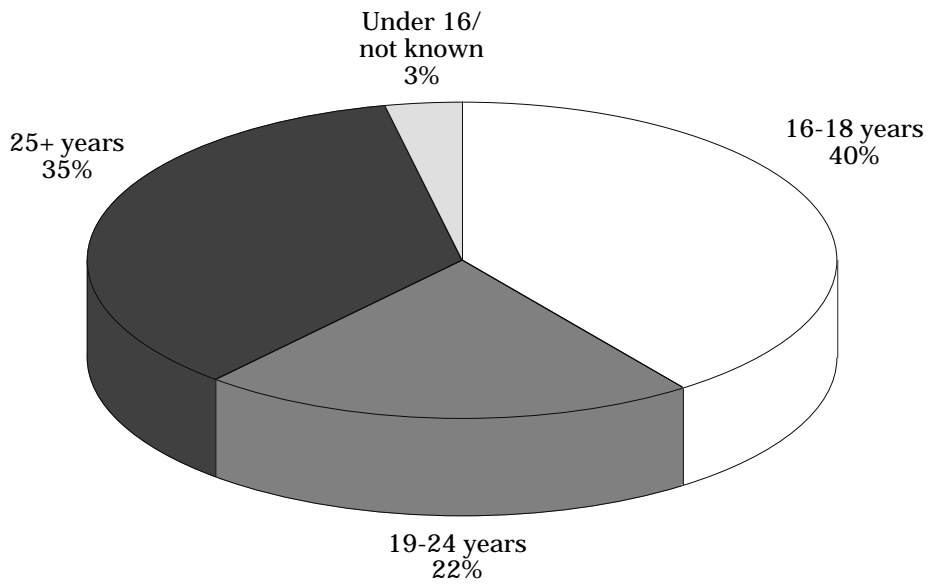


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**Figure 1**

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**Brackenhurst College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)**

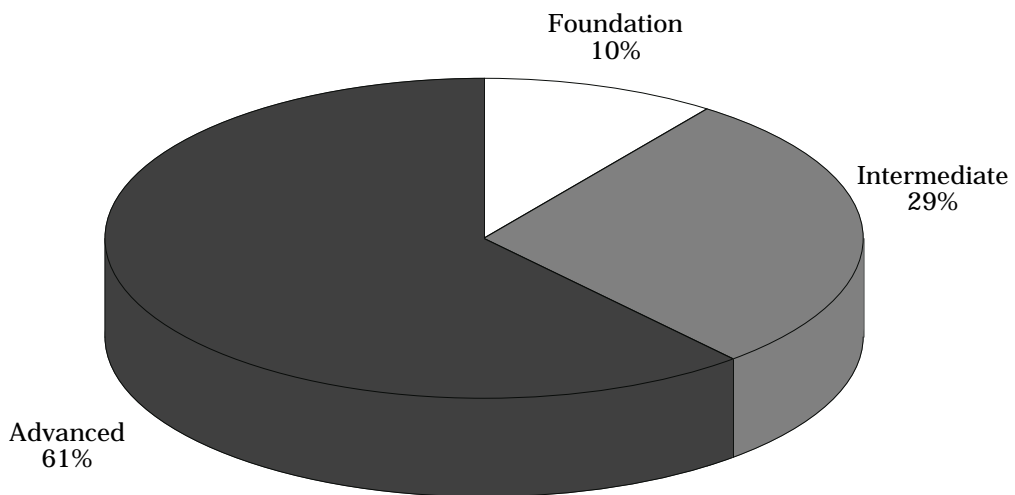


Enrolments: 610

**Figure 2**

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**Brackenhurst College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)**



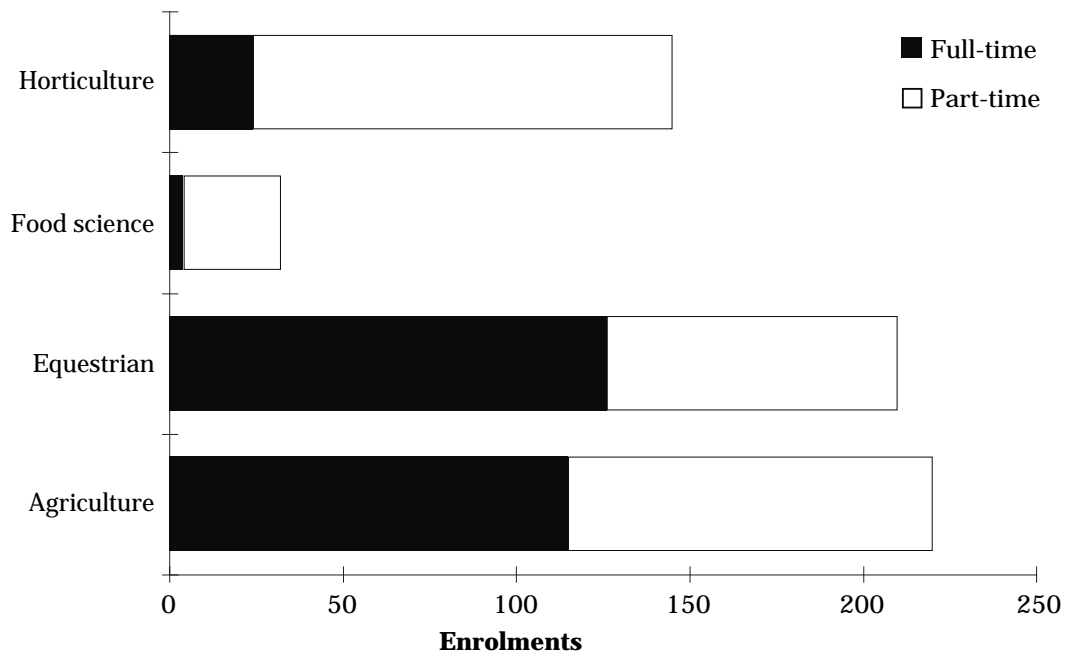
Enrolments: 610

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**Figure 3**

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**Brackenhurst College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)**



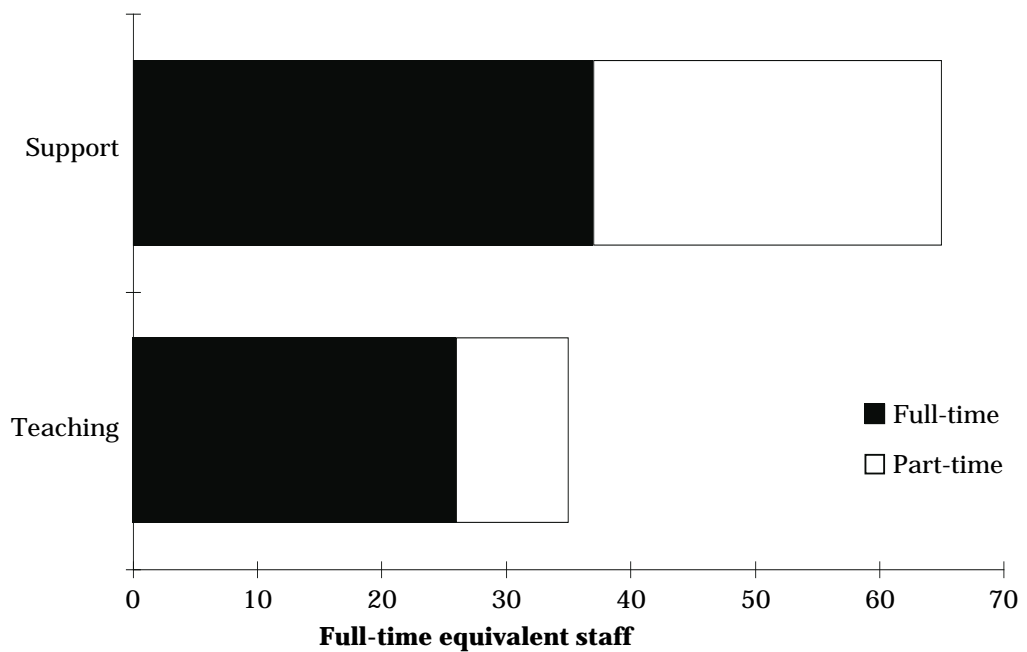
Enrolments: 610

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**Figure 4**

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**Brackenhurst College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)**

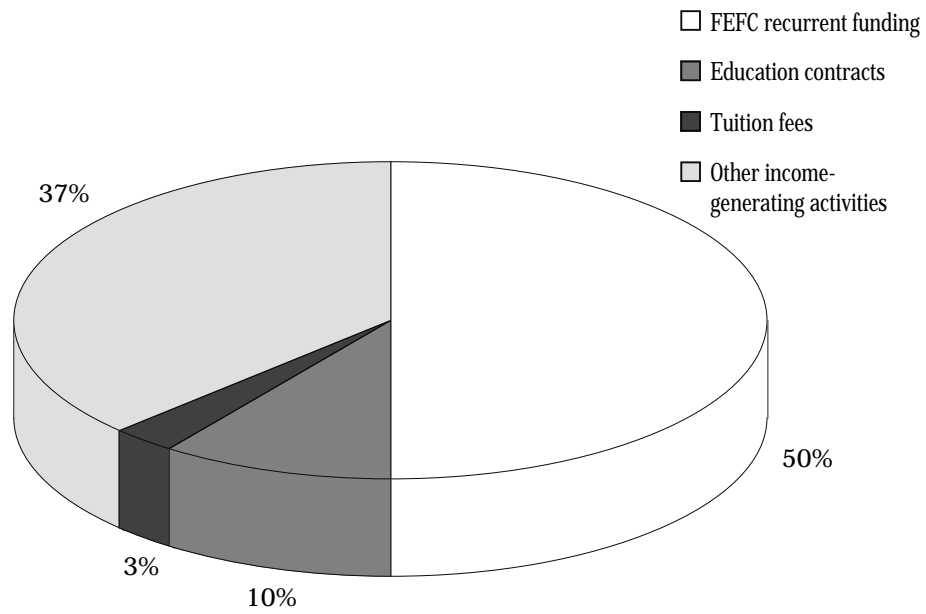


Full-time equivalent staff: 100

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**Figure 5**

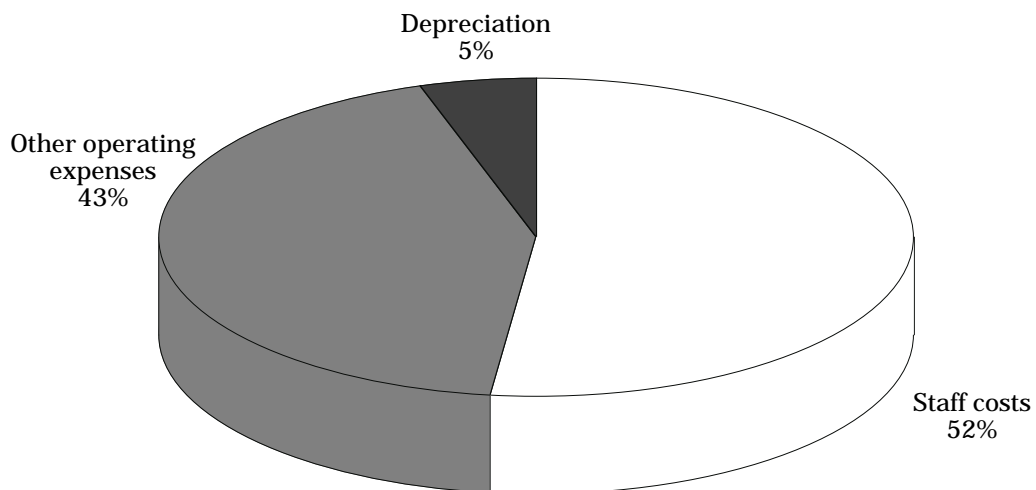
**Brackenhurst College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)**



Income: £4,710,000

**Figure 6**

**Brackenhurst College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)**



Expenditure: £4,510,000

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